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Nitze Also Declines to Testify

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First it was Defense Secretary Clark Clifford, now it's the Pentagon's No. 2 man, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul H. Nitze, who has sent his regrets about not appearing to testify publicly before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Only there were no regrets expressed. Just a phone call to the Committee staff from a Pentagon aide announcing that two lesser Defense officials were prepared to testify at the hearing scheduled for next Monday on the Administration's request for \$540 million in military aid authorization.

The Committee chairman, Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) immediately dispatched a short and elegantly muted letter to Secretary Clifford.

"The Committee regrets that . . . Nitze finds that he is unable to appear on March 25 as agreed," Fulbright wrote.

"It is the view of the Committee on Foreign Relations that the subject of military assistance is of such significance that the Secretary of Defense should be heard in public session as in the past. The Committee is, of course, aware of the need for you to familiarize yourself with the subject and will hold itself available for your appearance at your convenience."

What wasn't written was that Clifford and Nitze's boss, President Johnson, just doesn't want any more of his lieutenants exposed to questions on Vietnam and on how many more troops the Administration is prepared to send there. An impasse could hold up committee approval of the aid bill.

With only one exception, that of former Defense Secre-

tary Thomas Gates, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the past 15 years has come to expect an appearance by the Defense Secretary as the lead-off witness on military aid authorization.

This year, the Committee finally won its battle and got Secretary of State Dean Rusk to appear in public session on March 11—under the guise of foreign economic aid authorization, but in reality on the Administration's Vietnam pol-

icy. The Committee also had put in a request for Clifford, but got nowhere. Then Rusk surprised everyone with an announcement from the witness chair—right over public television—that Clifford would be appearing on March 18 (last Monday).

But Clifford didn't appear. He sent word that he was too busy and too new at his job. It was explained that Nitze and Paul C. Warnke, Assistant Defense Secretary for International Security Affairs, would

appear in Clifford's stead, and a week later, March 25 (next Monday).

Then came yesterday's word from the Pentagon that now it would be Warnke and Vice Adm. Luther C. (Pickles) Heinz, director of military assistance.

"The hearings are on the military assistance program and they are the pertinent witnesses," a Pentagon spokesman explained when queried. And he added: "There is not a lot of money involved."